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UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

OF

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FOR

AN APPARATUS FOR ETCHING A GLASS SUBSTRATE

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This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Application Serial No. 09/039,438, entitled "Etching Apparatus," filed March 16, 1998, which is related to, and incorporates by reference, U.S. Application Serial No. 09/002,037, entitled "Method of Fabricating a
5 Substrate," filed December 31, 1997. This application also claims the benefit of Korea Application No. 1999-14632 filed on April 23, 1999. The entirety of both the parent U.S. Applications and the priority Korean Application are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

10 The present invention relates to an etching apparatus, and more particularly, to an apparatus for etching a substrate uniformly by using ultrasonic oscillation.

Description of the Related Art

As a display device for a television and a personal computer, a large sized cathode ray tube (CRT) display device is commonly used. However, since the screen must be separated
15 from the electron gun by more than a predetermined distance for a large size screen CRT, the volume of the device is increased. Thus, such a CRT cannot be applied to a low weight, small size, and a low power consumption electronic device, such as a wall-mountable television, a portable television, and a notebook computer.

For a small and light display device, flat panel devices such as a liquid crystal display
20 device (LCD), plasma display panel (PDP), electroluminescent display (ELD) and vacuum fluorescent display (VFD) have been introduced recently. Among the above flat panel display devices, the LCD has been researched extensively for good picture quality and low power consumption. The LCD-applied portable television and notebook computer have been

introduced in the market, but there are problems to be solved in such LCD-applied devices. In particular, size and weight are important factors to be considered for the LCD.

For a small size and light LCD, there are several available methods for reducing the size and weight of the LCD element. However, the driving circuit and the thin film transistor, which are necessary elements of the LCD, are so thin that reducing these elements will not affect the weight in any significant manner. On the other hand, it is possible to reduce the weight of the LCD element by reducing the weight of the glass substrate that is a basic element of the LCD. Specifically, since the glass substrate is a heavy element of the LCD, methods of reducing the weight of the glass substrate have been continuously researched.

For a glass substrate of a given surface area, a light glass substrate requires a thin glass substrate. However, known methods of thinning the glass substrate cause damage including internal imperfections and surface roughness. Thus, the mechanical strength of the glass substrate is weakened, and the image quality of the LCD is accordingly deteriorated.

Conventionally, the most common method of reducing the weight of the glass substrate is to etch the surface of the glass substrate by soaking the substrate in a container having an etchant. In this method, however, the substrate is often not etched uniformly because of the non-uniform surface of the substrate. Further, the impurities generated during the etching process often attach to the surface of the substrate so that the resulting surface becomes even rougher.

To solve the aforementioned problems, the substrate is placed in a container having an etchant and then bubbles are generated and directed through a porous plate to the surface of the substrate in order to remove the impurities attached to the surface of the substrate, and a fresh etchant is applied to the surface of the substrate.

Figure. 1 is a sectional view showing a related art apparatus for etching a glass

substrate that is etched in a method employing nitrogen bubbles.

For reference, the related art was filed by the Applicant of the present invention as U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/389,959. Therefore, the present invention is an improvement of the related art.

5 As shown in Figure 1, a teflon cassette 117 maintaining fixed spaces is formed in the interior of etching bath 111 filled with etchant 121. The height of the etchant 121 is lower than that of the etching bath 111 so that the etchant cannot flow out to the outside. In the teflon cassette 117, a substrate 119 including a color filter substrate and a thin film transistor (TFL) substrate is supported by a support means (not shown in the figures). A nitrogen
10 bubble generation pipe 113 is formed on the lower portion of the teflon cassette 117 so that nitrogen bubbles 123 are supplied through a plurality of the nitrogen bubble generation tubes 115. The supplied nitrogen bubbles 123 rise along the surface of the substrate 119 so that the impurities generated during the photolithography process and adhering to the substrate surface are removed. In this type of etching process, the extent of etching of the substrate 119
15 depends on, and therefore can be determined by, the temperature obtained from an exothermic reaction that is generated between the etchant 121 and the substrate 119.

In this related art method, however, since the bubbles, necessarily having different sizes, are applied on the upper portion and lower portion of the substrate, there is a resultant thickness difference between the upper portion and lower portion. As a result, the substrate is
20 still easily damaged even by light force during the LCD process because of the non-uniformity of the thickness of the substrate. Further, the substrate must be soaked for a long period, for example, scores of minutes, to etch the substrate sufficiently. Thus, the processing cost is increased in this method.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly, the present invention is directed to an apparatus for etching a glass substrate that substantially obviates one or more problems due to limitations and disadvantages of the related art.

5 An object of the present invention is to provide an apparatus for etching a glass substrate having a thin thickness and uniform surface.

To achieve the objects and in accordance with the purpose of the invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, the apparatus for etching the glass substrate comprises an etching bath filled with etchant, a teflon cassette in the interior of the etching bath, said teflon cassette supporting a substrate including a color filter substrate and a TFT
10 substrate, and an ultrasonic oscillator generating ultrasonic vibration, attached to the exterior of the etching bath.

According to the present invention, impurities attached on the glass substrate can be removed during the etching process, before the photolithography process and without a special impurity removal. After assembling a color filter substrate and TFT substrate, when a
15 glass substrate is etched, impurities generated during the etching process attached on the surface of the glass substrate are removed so that the surface of the glass substrate will be uniform.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory and are intended to provide further
20 explanation of the invention as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings, which are included to provide a further understanding of the invention and are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate embodiments of the invention and together with the written description serve to explain the

principles of the invention.

In the drawings:

Figure 1 is a sectional view showing the apparatus for etching a glass substrate of the related art.

5 Figure 2 is a sectional view showing the apparatus for etching a glass substrate according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Hereinafter, the apparatus for etching a glass substrate of the present invention is explained in detail by the accompanying drawings.

10 Figure 2 is a sectional view showing the apparatus for etching a glass substrate according to the present invention. As shown in the figure, the etching apparatus according to the present invention comprises an etching bath 211 filled with etchant 221, a teflon cassette 217 in the interior of the etching bath 211, said cassette 217 supporting a substrate 219 including a color filter substrate and a TFT substrate and an ultrasonic oscillator 223 that
15 is generating ultrasonic vibration and is attached to the exterior of the etching bath 211, and which removes impurity by ultrasonic oscillation.

The height of the etchant 221 is lower than that of the etching bath 211 so that the etchant 221 cannot flow out to the outside. The etchant 221 is typically a hydrofluoric acid (HF) solution. The substrate 219 including a color filter substrate and a TFT substrate is
20 supported by a support means (not shown in the figures) maintaining fixed spaces.

Ultrasonic vibration (represented by dotted line arrows in the figures) generated by the ultrasonic oscillator 223 removes impurities attached on the surface of the substrate 219, wherein a shock effect generated by the ultrasonic oscillation is provided on the surface of the substrate 219 so that the impurities originated from photolithography processes are removed

from the surface of the substrate 219.

Herein, the etching processes using the apparatus of the present invention for etching a glass substrate will be described.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

5 (1) The etching bath 211 is filled with etchant 221.

(2) The teflon cassette 217 supporting the assembled glass substrate 219 is completely submerged in the etchant 221.

(3) After the teflon cassette 217 is completely submerged in the etchant 221, an ultrasonic oscillator 223 is oscillated within 30 seconds.

10 (4) In order to reduce operation time by heating effect, the temperature of the etchant is raised about 5-10°C.

As previously known, the ultrasonic vibration used in the present invention is widely used in fish-detecting depth measurement apparatuses, cleaning apparatuses, ultrasonic process apparatuses, in the medical and physical therapy field, and other end use technologies. In the present invention, the ultrasonic vibration separates the impurities produced during photolithography processes from the surface of the substrate, and effectively removes the organic layer formed on the surface of the substrate.

15 The method of removing impurities using nitrogen bubbles in the related art has a problem generated by the nature of nitrogen bubbles. Also in the method, a bubble generator must be provided in the interior of the etching bath because nitrogen bubbles have to pass the surface of the glass substrate. This structure provides many limitations in the selection of etchant and in the design of etching apparatus.

20 On the other hand, impurities can be separated from the surface of the substrate through ultrasonic oscillation without contacting directly on the glass substrate in the present

invention. Therefore, maximum simplification of the etching apparatus is obtained.

In the case that the desired thickness of the substrate after etching is very thin, the present invention can be prove more effective. That is, ultrasonic oscillation can be easily controlled mechanically, and the present invention can thereby prevent damage to the substrate, even when etching of long duration is necessary, as in the case of producing a very thin substrate.

Consequently, since the apparatus for etching a glass substrate of the present invention employs ultrasonic vibration in order to remove from the glass substrate the impurities generated during the photolithography process, a glass substrate is readily processed to have a uniformly thin thickness and a uniformly flat surface.

Also, simplicity of manufacturing processes is obtained because no special processes are needed before the photolithography processes to remove impurities attached on the surface of the glass substrate.

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications can be made in the multi-domain liquid crystal display device and method of manufacturing of the present invention without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. Thus, it is intended that the present invention covers the modifications and variations of this invention provided they come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.